4.8: History of Communication Study Summary

Summary

Our history tells us that men and women from all cultures have been interested in observing and theorizing about the role of communication in multiple contexts—government, politics, law, religion, technology, and education. The Old School of communication study consisted of four major periods of intellectual development—Classical, Medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment. The Classical Period (500 BCE-400 CE) gave birth to seminal figures who set the foundation for communication study. Plato (428-348 BCE) introduced the concept and practice of the dialectic. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) defined rhetoric and three necessary proofs for persuasion. Cicero (106-43 BCE) contributed the canons of rhetoric— invention, arrangement, expression/style, memory, and delivery.

As the church dominated public life in the Medieval Period (400-1400 CE), there was little intellectual development. St. Augustine is one who stands out for his continued development of rhetorical theory and its relationship to the church.

The Renaissance (1400-1600 CE) was a rebirth of sorts as Christine de Pisan (1365-1429) and Laura Cereta (1469-1499) continued the tradition of Aspasia and Pan Chao in securing educational opportunities for women. Ramus further developed the canons by combining style and delivery while Bacon continued his work following the classical tradition.

The final period, the Enlightenment (1600-1800), is characterized by intellectual trends—neoclassicism, the eclectic method of belletristic scholars, psychological/epistemological study of rhetoric, and the elocutionary approach.

The New School of communication study brought about more formal academic departments of Communication in the 1800-1900s. Along with these academic placements came the formation of professional organizations such as NCA and ICA that helped foster greater recognition and development of the study of communication on a national and
international scale. As the U.S. and world was challenged by changes in technology, politics, and social life, Communication scholars sought to address them by focusing on five areas of research—political institutions, the role of communication in social life, social-psychological analyses of communication, communication and education, and commercially motivated research. Following WWI and WWII scholars continued to be motivated by global and social issues such as the women’s movement, the civil rights movement, and the anti-war movement. The trend continues as current scholars are driven by the prominent social and technological issues of the day such as technology, health care, social issues, and the environment.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the specializations of the Communication professors at your school?
2. How did your professor get started in the field of Communication?
3. If you wanted to study some type of communication phenomenon, what would it be and why?
4. With the increasing emphasis on communication and information technologies, what kind of communication research do you think will happen in the future?
5. Why is knowing our history valuable for understanding the discipline?

KEY TERMS AND PEOPLE

- arrangement
- Aristotle
- audience analysis
- Aspasia
- Augustine
- canons of rhetoric
- Cicero
- classical period
- Corax
- delivery
- dialectic
- eclectic method of belletristic scholars
- enlightenment
- Francis Bacon
- invention
- Isocrates
- Laura Cereta
- medieval period
- memory
- neoclassicism
- Pan Chao
• Petrus Ramus
• Plato
• psychological/epistemological school of rhetoric
• Quintilian
• renaissance
• rhetoric
• Socrates
• sophists
• style
• Tisias
• Vach

Contributions and Affiliations

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